

What is a Natural Play Space?

Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature

A space intentionally designed or designated to integrate natural components into a place for structured and unstructured play and learning. This natural play space will:

- Provide an important early connection for children with nature and create future environmental stewards
- Provide an opportunity for both physical and creative play
- Support children's physical, intellectual, and emotional development

Elements of a Natural Play Space-

(Based on David Sobel's "Play Motifs"- Design Principles)

1. Adventure- physically challenging

- Climbing
- Balancing
- Offers a variety of options- ages and abilities

2. Fantasy and Imagination- challenge and stimulate the imagination

- Active Play
- Creative Play

3. Animal Allies- creating bonds and associations with animals

- Connecting from the animals perspective
- The opportunity to observe animals or "explore" their worlds

4. Maps and Paths-places to explore

- Pathways to explore
- Variety of Terrain (hills, bumps)

5. Special Places- found or constructed spaces, bridge b/w safety of home and outside world

- Hiding places
- Fort building

6. Small Worlds- miniature ecosystems etc.

- Plants
- Sand
- Water

7. Hunting and Gathering- connection to our ancestors and way we co-existed in nature

- Loose parts/ parts that can be manipulated
- Pinecones, sticks, stones



Visit the Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature at dnr.maryland.gov/cin/nps/

